

Turnover Intent Among Middle School Teachers

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine the relations among mentoring, adaptation, satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intention. Two-hundred fifty two middle school teachers from ten Midwestern U.S. schools were surveyed. Hierarchical regression results demonstrated that positive mentoring experiences, successful adaptation, and greater commitment reduced the likelihood of turnover intent.

The call for reform has plagued the educational arena with a whirlwind of transformations challenging efforts to retain effective, highly qualified teachers. In 1988-89, a total of 162,000 teachers left the profession, while in 2008-2009, a total of 269,800 left. Additionally, a higher percentage (8.8) of secondary public school teachers left the profession in 2008-2009 than the percentage (7.5) of elementary school teachers who left (Aud et al., 2011).

Marston, Brunetti, and Courtney (2005) compared elementary and high school teachers' motivation to remain in the profession and suggested further research should be conducted to include middle school teachers. Two subsequent studies citing Marston et al. (2005) explored job satisfaction among high school teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2012) and variables affecting retention among elementary school teachers (Shen, Leslie, & Spybrook, 2012). However, neither study included middle school teachers. Teacher retention is crucial at the middle school level due to the students' specific needs during this developmental stage (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Transition to middle school has been associated with declining motivation in students (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgely, 1999). However, the call for research on retention of middle school teachers (Marston et al., 2005) has not been sufficiently addressed.

Research on teacher retention has supported a relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career commitment, and intent to remain in the profession (Billingsley, 1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Kushman, 1992; Shann, 1998; Steers, 1977). Job satisfaction has also been identified as an outcome of the socialization process of workplace adaptation (Reio, 2002), and mentoring has been found to facilitate this process (Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Acknowledging that mentoring, workplace adaptation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment have been linked positively to turnover intent, defined as the likelihood an employee will voluntarily end one's employment in a work organization (Ingersoll, 2001), yet not studied concurrently with middle school teachers, this study explores the relationships among these variables. This need to answer Marston et al.'s (2005) call for exploring factors related to job satisfaction and retention among middle school teachers was accentuated by Moore's (2012) finding that teaching in a middle school significantly increased the odds of teacher dissatisfaction by 31.8%.

Theoretical Framework

We use an organizational socialization framework to inform this study. Organizational socialization refers to the proactive learning to meet the challenges of daily workplace life. In essence, it is "learning the ropes" of how to fit into one's job, team/group, or organization. Organizational socialization is a curiosity-driven, information seeking process in service of acquiring the information needed to learn and ultimately adapt to the organization (Reio &

Wiswell, 2000). The learning and subsequent adaptation to the organization have been linked to job performance and engagement, as well as being positively mentored, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Socialization theory predicts that learning (as in learning from being mentored) and adaptation will result in greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and less intention to turnover (Reio & Sutton, 2006).

Mentoring

Several studies have supported a relationship between mentoring and employee turnover (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Raabe & Beehr, 2003). Mentoring has been defined as an interpersonal relationship between experienced and inexperienced colleagues (Russell & Adams, 1997). Mentoring can consist of formal relationships established by the organization, or informal relationships that develop naturally among colleagues (Kram, 1983). Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, and Dubois's (2008) meta-analysis of empirical research published between 1985 and 2006 revealed that mentoring was positively and significantly correlated with a wide range of protégé outcomes, including career attitudes.

Payne and Huffman (2005) found that mentored employees had higher levels of both affective and continuance commitment than non-mentored employees, and protégés with supervisor mentors reported higher affective commitment than protégés with non-supervisor mentors. Data collected 10 years later revealed that affective commitment partially mediated the relationship between mentoring and turnover.

The importance of mentoring relationships in the teaching profession is magnified because teachers usually work in isolation (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) revealed that being mentored was negatively related to turnover. Woods and Weasmer (2004) advocated for a supportive community of informal mentoring relationships among teachers. Raabe and Beehr (2003) found significant negative correlations between informal supervisor mentor relationships and turnover intent, and significant positive correlations between informal coworker mentor relationships and job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Workplace Adaptation and Job Satisfaction

Relationships with mentors can play a pivotal role in the socialization process that results in workplace adaptation. Establishing relationships, acculturation and job knowledge have been identified as defining workplace adaptation (Reio & Sutton, 2006). Job satisfaction has been viewed not only as an outcome of this socialization process, but as a significant factor in the process itself (Reio, 2002). The enhanced learning associated with workplace adaptation reported by Reio and Wiswell (2000) can also influence teacher commitment because teacher efficacy has been found to positively affect teacher commitment (Chan, Lau, Nie, Lim, & Hogan, 2008) and reduce the likelihood of turnover intent.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is referred to as the strength of one's identification with, and involvement in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Steers (1977) revealed that commitment was strongly related to intent and desire to remain in the organization. Teacher job satisfaction has been shown to be a predictor of teacher retention, teacher commitment, and school effectiveness (Shann, 1998). Other studies have identified also working conditions or work-related factors to be predictors of turnover intent (Billingsley, 1992; Ingersoll, 2001; Kushman, 1992; Mertler, 2002).

These work-related variables were also predictors of workplace commitment in Kushman's (1992) study of elementary and middle school teachers and Ingersoll's (2001) analysis of teacher turnover. Kushman (1992) found orderly school climate and teachers'

involvement in decisions to be predictors of organizational commitment. Ingersoll (2001) linked organizational effectiveness to teacher turnover.

Purposes of the Present Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between mentoring, workplace adaptation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intent among middle school teachers. The set of variables have each been studied extensively in organizations, among a wide array of occupations, but not with middle school teachers. In essence, each variable is hypothesized to contribute unique positive variance to predicting turnover intent among middle school teachers. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework for this study.

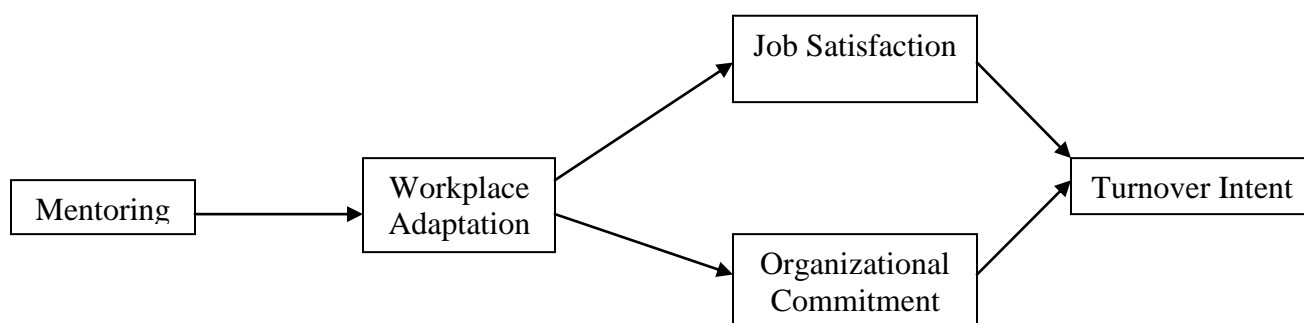


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Link between Middle-School Teacher Mentoring, Workplace Adaptation, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment, and Turnover Intent

Guided by the review of the literature, the following research hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive, statistically significant relationship between mentoring and workplace adaptation.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive, statistically significant relationship between workplace adaptation and job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive, statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intent.

Method

Participants and Procedures

We chose to examine turnover intent in middle schools because of the lack of emphasis on middle school research in general, and the relatively high turnover rate for teachers in our middle schools. With both the superintendent's and principals' support, all middle schools in a large Midwestern school district participated under the condition of confidentiality. Teacher participants, in turn, were anonymous. A survey battery was constructed; the survey measures were counter-balanced for each school to reduce the likelihood of introducing common method bias into the study. A sealed box with a hole in the top (for inputting the survey) was left in plain sight in the main office area at each school. The overall participation rate at the ten schools was

41.2 percent. The initial participants ($N = 394$) were asked to indicate whether they had experienced mentoring while at their current school (yes/no); those participants who had constituted the final sample. The final sample consisted of 252 teachers (58.3% female). Roughly sixty-three percent of the participants were Caucasian, 15.9% African-American, 11.2% Hispanic, 4.0% Asian, and 6.0 “other.” The mean age of the participants was 36.4 years ($SD = 11.5$), with 10.2 years of experience ($SD = 6.8$).

Research Measures

Job Satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was measured by the 3-item scale included in the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.77.

Mentoring. Mentoring was measured by Noe’s (1988) Mentoring Functions Scale. The 5-point Likert-type scale was scored as 1 = “To a very slight extent” to 5 = “To a very large extent.” The Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Organizational Commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) operationally defined organizational commitment as a three-component model: the desire to remain with an organization (affective commitment), perceived need to remain with the organization (continuance commitment), and obligation to stay with the organization (normative commitment). To increase the likelihood of participation by prospective teachers (shortening survey length), only two of these dimensions, affective and continuance commitment, were measured in this study. We felt justified in making this choice because normative commitment has been problematic in some organizational studies in the helping professions because of its apparent overlap with affective commitment (Chan & Morrison, 2000). Four of the scale items measured affective commitment, and four of the items measured continuance commitment. Responses were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Cronbach’s alpha was .89 for affective commitment, .89 for continuance commitment, and .92 for the overall 8-item measure. The overall measure’s scores were used for all subsequent analyses.

Turnover intent. The three-item Intention to Turnover Scale is a subscale from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann et al., 1979). This three-item subscale was designed to measure the perceptions of organizational members about their psychological state relevant to the quality of work life issues in the workplace. The first item was rated “not likely” (1) to “extremely likely” (5); the second and third items were rated “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The coefficient alpha was .86.

Workplace adaptation. Workplace adaptation was measured by the 18-item Workplace Adaptation Questionnaire (Reio & Wiswell, 2000). Responses were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Cronbach’s alpha was .96.

Demographics. The survey included items designed to obtain information about participant age, gender, and time employed at school. Each was measured as a categorical variable.

Control variables. We controlled for a number of demographic variables, including age, gender, and time employed at school. These variables have been identified as being predictors of workplace adaptation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, as well as the dependent variable (Kushman, 1992; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Reio & Reio, 2011; Shan, 1998). By being able to control for these variables in the hierarchical regression equations (steps guided by theory and research; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), we were able to illustrate the unique influence of the independent variables on turnover intent.

Results

Zero-order correlations were explored and the strength and magnitude of relations among the research variables were roughly as expected. The r s ranged from $|.14|$ - $|.56|$. The strongest correlation was between organizational commitment and turnover intent ($r = -.56$) and satisfaction and organizational commitment ($r = .56$). To test the hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regressions were then run to ascertain the unique relations among the independent and dependent variables, after statistically controlling for the demographic variables (H1-H3), being mentored (H2 & H3), and workplace adaptation (H3). No evidence of multicollinearity was found (VIF [< 10.0] and tolerance [$> .10$] values were acceptable; Stevens, 2002).

For hypothesis one, after statistically controlling for the demographic variables (age, gender, tenure; $R^2 = .03$, $p = .091$), being mentored ($\beta = .264$) was positively and significantly associated with workplace adaptation ($R^2 = .11$, $p = .011$). Overall, the model explained 8.2% (adjusted R^2) of the variance in workplace adaptation; thus, hypothesis one was supported in that being mentored was a positive predictor of adaptation. For hypothesis 2, after statistically controlling for the demographic variables ($R^2 = .01$, $p = .456$) and being mentored ($R^2 = .02$, $p = .04$), workplace adaptation was positively and significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = .28$; $R^2 = .05$, $p = .002$). Overall, the model explained 5.8% (adjusted R^2) of the variance in job satisfaction. To further test hypothesis 2, after statistically controlling for the demographic variables ($R^2 = .03$, $p = .118$) and being mentored ($R^2 = .06$, $p = .001$), workplace adaptation was positively and significantly related to organizational commitment ($\beta = .264$; $R^2 = .064$, $p < .001$). Overall, the model explained 13.3% (adjusted R^2) of the variance in organizational commitment. Therefore, hypothesis two was supported because adaptation and job satisfaction uniquely predicted organizational commitment. Finally, for hypothesis 3, after controlling for the demographic variables ($R^2 = .06$, $p = .01$), being mentored ($R^2 = .02$, $p = .04$), and workplace adaptation ($R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$), job satisfaction and organizational commitment were entered as a block into the regression equation. Organizational commitment was negatively and significantly related to turnover intent ($\beta = -.52$), however, job satisfaction ($\beta = -.003$, $p = .97$) was not a significant predictor ($R^2 = .22$, $p < .001$ for block). Overall, the model explained 38.8% (adjusted R^2) of the variance in turnover intent. Thus, hypothesis 3 was only partially supported in that only organizational commitment significantly predicted turnover.

Discussion

The hierarchical regression results provide preliminary evidence that after controlling for select demographic variables prior literature suggested might have an influence on the strength and direction of relations among the research variables, mentoring, workplace adaptation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are linked to turnover intent in this sample of middle school teachers. In each case, the findings support the socialization theory and the extant empirical literature on the hypothesized linkages of the independent and dependent variables. In essence, those with positive mentoring experiences were more likely to adapt successfully to their school (Eby et al., 2007; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Further, workplace adaptation was linked positively in turn to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Ingersoll, 2001; Reio & Sutton, 2006), suggesting that those who adapted to their workplace successfully were more likely to be satisfied with their job and committed to the school. Finally, overall, those who experienced positive mentoring, successfully adapted to the school, and were committed to the school, were less likely intending to turnover. These findings present initial evidence that being mentored, degree of workplace adaptation (and thus fitting in to the school), and organizational

commitment positively predicted a vital school outcome, that is, turnover intent, often considered the most powerful predictor of actual turnover (Ajzen, 1991).

In these uncertain times, middle school teachers are leaving their jobs in record numbers (Marston et al., 2005). Considering the almost crisis level of middle school teacher turnover among U.S. teachers, a predictive model such as the one tested in this research can point to possible leverage points to designing interventions to reduce the likelihood of turnover intent and actual turnover. For example, well designed formal mentoring programs through psychosocial and career advisement activities could foster better adaptation and commitment to the school to head off possible turnover intentions (Kram, 1983). Policies aimed at helping newcomers fit in more quickly and expertly (encourage informal mentoring activities) could be tested for their relative effectiveness in reducing turnover intentions. Longitudinal research designs could examine the salience of the research variables over time and during different stages of one's career. Moderator variables (e.g., school climate) could be included in the model proposed in the research to ascertain their possible usefulness in reducing turnover intentions. Future research with larger samples, with proportional representation by age, gender, and ethnicity that includes measures of both intended and actual turnover is required to further test the model presented in this study to support external validation efforts.

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